

21 August 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Intelligence  
SUBJECT : Preliminary Thoughts on a Group to Monitor  
World Food Availability and Demand

Need

Since the "food problem" will probably be with us for a number of years, it would be useful to have an interdisciplinary group monitoring the overall situation and producing periodic assessments of the outlook for supply and demand in the international food market, as well as need in very poor areas that cannot afford to buy at market prices; certain economic-political implications of the situation should be covered also.

Disciplines and Participants

In making periodic assessments of the situation, one would need agronomists and geographers (to estimate supply), economists (to estimate effective demand), political-economists (to estimate the global interaction of demand and supply), political scientists (to estimate the resultant political ramifications of shortage or excess if they are thought to be coming). In the longer run, demographers and climatologists would be involved (or should be). People expert in the agricultural research and development business would also be helpful if the project expanded to include longer run forecasting.

Participants would include the traditional foreign affairs components of government--CIA (OER, OGCR, OPR), State (INR, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, and others if appropriate), and Treasury. Also participating would be Agriculture, Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and perhaps other components.

Goal

To keep US policy-makers, Congress, and (indirectly) private agro-business interests abreast of both short- and long-term trends in world supply of and demand for food, and the political implications thereof.

Product

The group should issue preliminary assessments in May-June (after the major planting has been done), in August (when one can guess the harvest), and then a more definitive assessment in, say, October when the harvest is known. (These dates reflect northern hemisphere agriculture, which provides 90 percent of world production.)

Reports should be as free of policy bias as is humanly possible if they are to be of maximum use. Dissents should be welcomed to let users know the major areas of disagreement. If there is no majority view, all main opinions ought to be presented for the same reason.

Notes

Because such a project would have a high domestic content (in the estimates of US crops and US demand), it should not be done in CIA or headed by a CIA type.

The first year of such an effort is likely to produce an ambivalent set of reports. The break-in period will be a long one. Moreover, the success of such an effort will depend heavily on the ability and will of the various executive offices to cooperate.

The product should either be totally unclassified, but protected until release (as are the Agriculture Department's forecasts), or highly classified because of the large amount of money speculators have and would use if product became good and accurate.

I would think that members of appropriate congressional staffs should be invited as observers or contributors, and people from the private sector who are experts might serve as consultants.

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STATINTL

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